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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

50X1

COUNTRY USSR

SUBJECT The Georgian Uprising of 1924/The Famine of 1931-32/Nationality of Political Authorities in Georgia

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50X1

50X1

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1. 50X1

uprising involved about 50 thousand mountain people, scattered in a number of villages, who decided to rid themselves of the Communist authorities in the area. They started killing Communist officials in the villages with old carbines hidden away since before the Bolshevik revolution and, in some cases, with stones and other crude weapons. They battled the NKVD for several weeks and then units of the Soviet army were sent in to put down the insurrection. There was heavy fighting for a period of about six weeks. For some months thereafter, scattered guerrilla action continued to disturb the peace. The NKVD, and later the Army, arrested all of the insurgents who could be taken alive and sent them to slave labor camps, mainly in Siberia. I do not know how many were arrested but I believe that about one thousand insurgents were killed. Another two thousand, including most of the leaders of the rebellion, escaped across the border into Turkey. Later the border was sealed tight by the Soviet army with electrified barbed wire, German shepherd dogs, and large numbers of border guards. Many villages were destroyed, mainly by the insurgents themselves who razed their villages before fleeing to mountain hideouts or trying to escape across the border. As is probably well known, the local Soviet authorities attempted to explain the uprising as being of a religious nature. Religion was probably involved to some degree, but my recollection is that political and economic controls were largely responsible for the revolt against Communist officialdom.

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2. [redacted] 50X1

The famine was very bad but I do not recall that there were any deaths directly attributable to starvation. The mild climate of most of Georgia, yielding plenty of grass and fruit through most of the year, saved the situation. Undoubtedly millions would have died if Georgia were less favored climatically. The death rate rose among children and old people whose susceptibilities to disease were increased by malnutrition. There was a great deal of stomach trouble in all age groups and the incidence of TB was very high among children. Livestock perished by the thousands but the people did not touch the cadavers. Religious sanctions among both Moslem and Christian Georgians precluded eating of the cadavers, despite the constant and widespread hunger.

Ration cards were issued to the people and the only food distributed was one half pound of black bread per person per day. The blackbread was later replaced by white cornbread, doughy stuff that was difficult both to swallow and to digest. Everyone supplemented the bread with grass and fruit. I was one of the hungry children who rushed out to the fields every day after school to feed on grass. Fortunately, four or five different varieties were available and several of them were reasonably tasty.

I might mention the psychological atmosphere which prevailed during the famine. The hunger and depression of the people, and their lowered vitality, created a kind of anarchy. Food was the only interest and the normal mode of living, the normal concern with possessions and work and so forth, ceased to exist. The people did not prey on one another but something very close to a jungle situation developed. 50X1

3. [redacted] 50X1

The top authorities (Party and Government authorities were the same individuals, were all Georgians. In 1941, [redacted], the mayor of the city was Georgian, four of the six city supervisors were Georgians, and the other two supervisors were Armenians. To my knowledge, these top positions in Tbilisi had never been held by Russians. Tbilisi had a population of about 800 thousand in 1941. At that time the NKVD was composed of about 95% Russian troops but all the command positions were held by Georgians, Armenians, or Azerbaijani. There were many Russians in Tbilisi and some of them held good jobs in education, journalism, and other official or semi-official fields. But no Russians, openly at least and probably actually, held high political posts. In this connection, I might mention that in 1941 Georgian was still the language of the street in Tbilisi although many Georgians could speak Russian. In contrast, Russian was widely spoken in Erevan, Armenian SSR, in 1941. 50X1

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